

THE WHITE HOUSE  
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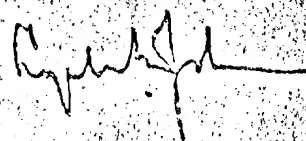
CONFIDENTIAL

NATIONAL SECURITY ACTION MEMORANDUM NO. 277

TO: The Secretary of State  
The Secretary of Defense  
The Director of Central Intelligence

Because we may have to be dealing with a continuing series of fast-moving foreign developments, I would like to have an early review of our procedures for anticipating foreign crises.

I am asking McGeorge Bundy to pull together for me any suggestions in this area which might be worthy of consideration.



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DRAFT

19 March 1964

MEMORANDUM FOR: (Bundy)

SUBJECT : The Anticipation of Foreign Crises

REFERENCE : NSAM 277

1. The anticipation of foreign crises is a fundamental problem, running across the whole range of political, economic, sociological and even military intelligence. It is also an exceptionally intractable one. Unlike the specialized problem of providing warning of impending military action, it is not susceptible to the methodology of "indications intelligence". A nation preparing to go to war must do certain things; some of these things are conspicuous and therefore detectable. Political crisis, however, arises from the complex interaction of all-too-human beings and political and social dynamics which they do not necessarily understand or control. Examination of the most recent crises with which the US Government has had to deal--Cyprus, Panama, East Africa, Vietnam, Malaysia--shows few patterns or similarities. Specifically, Communist policy cannot be singled out as a unifying element; only in Vietnam is the crisis primarily a result of deliberate Communist action.

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2. CIA believes that the anticipation of crises depends less on mechanical approaches, "quick fixes" or organizational questions than on the general quality of intelligence produced, and essentially on the caliber of intelligence personnel. Within this framework, and recognizing that no system can guarantee the US Government that it will not occasionally be surprised by foreign developments, there are elements in the present system which can and should be strengthened.

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a. Collection: An effective [REDACTED] with reporting responsibilities clearly determined and vigorously pursued, is essential if political warning is to be provided. Periodic visits by experienced inter-agency inspection teams might provide some improvement.

b. Analysis: In general, present procedures seem adequate. The problem is to get and keep the best possible people. Warning is as likely to come from a trained analyst's visceral reaction to a seemingly innocuous bit of information as from a circumstantial field report of high evaluation.

c. Reporting: One problem that has not been adequately solved is that of communication between the intelligence producer and the national policymaker.

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notwithstanding the number of intelligence publications devoted to this purpose. I am giving this subject fuller treatment in the following paragraphs.

3. Both producer and policymaker are at fault. The intelligence officer may take out cheap insurance by publishing extensive "laundry lists" of potential crises in which genuine warnings are buried, or may coordinate his product until warning is effectively camouflaged by qualifiers and overformal language, or may lose focus on his audience by treating the dramatic and immediate in one publication and the dull and gradual in another. The senior policymaker may be too reluctant to accept warnings that go counter to his own policies, or too dulled by cumulative exposure to read his intelligence perceptively, or too preoccupied with the immediate to respond to the longer-range.

4. To the extent that there is an answer to these difficulties, it lies not in creating additional publications or repeating warnings by rote in existing ones, but in sharpening intelligence warning and aiming it more directly at responsible officials. For instance, consideration might be given to holding regular National Security Council meetings limited to examination of crises which can be expected in the months ahead. Such a meeting would

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give us the opportunity to ensure that the highest levels of the government have been warned, in specific and direct terms, of problems which the intelligence community foresees. In a broader sense, I believe some of the same results can be obtained by a government-wide campaign to reduce the number of administering, reviewing, coordinating, editing, and sometimes operating echelons which insulate the senior policymaker from the intelligence desk officer.

5. Our widening of the distribution of the President's Intelligence Checklist is one effort to tighten this crucial relationship. Another, perhaps less direct, is the increased attention we are giving, in National Intelligence Estimates to warning of developments which are realistic possibilities, even if less probable than others. We continue to highlight the main lines of probability, but attempt to convey greater awareness of variations and contingencies.

6. Beyond these measures, I would propose within CIA to:

a. Conduct more systematic periodic reviews of the raw intelligence received on each target country to make sure we know what is going on there.

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b. Conduct similar reviews of our finished reporting on quiescent but inflammable situations with a view to providing more sharply focussed warning to responsible senior officials, perhaps by personal memorandum.

c. Attach to the Central Intelligence Bulletin selected longer-range articles from the Current Intelligence Weekly Review which deal with potentially dangerous situations not susceptible to normal daily reporting.

JOHN A. MCCONE  
Director

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Box 3

DCI Action Memo

1961-25

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY OFFICIAL ROUTING SLIP			
TO	NAME AND ADDRESS	DATE	INITIALS
1	Mr Smith	4 Feb	RJ
2			(B)
3	AD/C1		
4			
5			
6			
ACTION		DIRECT REPLY	PREPARE REPLY
APPROVAL		DISPATCH	RECOMMENDATION
COMMENT		FILE	RETURN
CONCURRENCE		INFORMATION	SIGNATURE
Remarks:			
<p>Chet Cozart has the original and has already discussed this problem with Mr George Bundy.</p> <p>Mr Chris has seen PAB</p>			
FOLD HERE TO RETURN TO SENDER			
FROM: NAME, ADDRESS AND PHONE NO.			DATE
[Redacted]			7E32 2/4
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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY OFFICIAL ROUTING SLIP			
TO	NAME AND ADDRESS	DATE	INITIALS
1	Deputy Director (Intelligence)		
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ACTION		DIRECT REPLY	PREPARE REPLY
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Remarks:			
<p>Mr. McCone and General Carter have seen the attached NSAM. General Carter asks that you keep an ear to the ground with Mac Bundy and other members of the White House staff as appropriate in order to keep General Carter and DCI informed of the directions this NSAM will take us. The NSAM is not being given other distribution within the Agency although it is assumed you will want to tip off AD/CI and AD/NE.</p>			
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